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Overall progress achieved since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

International institutional arrangements*

(Chapter 38 of Agenda 21)

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INTRODUCTION

1. The present report reviews progress made in the implementation of the objectives set out in chapter 38 of Agenda 21 (International institutional arrangements),[1] taking into account the decisions taken by the Commission on Sustainable Development on this subject in 1994 and 1996 at its second and fourth sessions respectively. A background paper providing more detailed analysis on institutional arrangements within the United Nations system is available separately. The background paper and this report have been prepared on the basis of consultations undertaken during the inter-agency expert meeting on post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development institutional arrangements held in New York from 31 October to 1 November 1997. A description of post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development institutional arrangements undertaken by individual organizations is contained in a 1996 report of the Secretary-General (E/CN.17/1996/16) and in 1996 background paper No. 1.

2. It is important to place the assessment of post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development international institutional arrangements in context. Agenda 21 and the other agreements associated with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development are far-reaching in their recognition of the fact that the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development must be treated in an integrated and balanced way. They affirm that individual sectors can no longer be dealt with in isolation. New and stronger relationships are encouraged among the institutions of the United Nations system, international financial institutions, other intergovernmental bodies outside the United Nations system, including regional organizations, and major groups. These interactions pose particular challenges for the institutional arrangements put in place after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. They require multidisciplinary approaches among specialists and intersectoral coordination at local, national, regional and global levels.

3. In addition, the post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development institutional arrangements take place against the backdrop of ongoing efforts to strengthen, restructure and revitalize the United Nations system in the economic, social and related fields. Moreover, the growing number of international conventions calls for increased awareness of linkages between their intergovernmental and support arrangements and those of the United Nations system and other organizations.

I. SELECTING KEY OBJECTIVES

4. The focus of this report is on the assessment of the performance of the United Nations system in achieving the key objectives of chapter 38 of Agenda 21. National implementation and non-governmental organizations, other aspects of the chapter, will be dealt with by national profiles, the report of the Secretary-General on chapter 8 (E/CN.17/1997/2/Add.7), the report on major groups (E/CN.17/1997/2/Add.22), in particular on chapters 27 and 28, and the report on chapter 37 (E/CN.17/1997/2/Add.27) to some extent. In this regard, four objectives of chapter 38 will be addressed in this report.

5. The first objective is enhancement of the role and functioning of the United Nations system in the field of environment and development. In this area, all relevant agencies, organizations and programmes of the United Nations system are to adopt concrete programmes for the implementation of Agenda 21 and to provide policy guidance for United Nations activities and advice to Governments, upon request, within their areas of competence. The second is strengthening cooperation and coordination on environment and development in the United Nations system. The third is strengthening institutional capabilities and arrangements required for the effective implementation, follow-up and review of Agenda 21. The fourth is assistance in strengthening and coordination of national, subregional and regional capacities and actions in the areas of environment and development.

II. PROMISING CHANGES

A. Post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development institutional arrangements

1. Role of the Commission on Sustainable Development

(a) Functioning of the Commission on Sustainable Development

6. The Commission on Sustainable Development, established in 1992 by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/191 as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council, meets annually for two to three weeks.

7. Active inter-sessional work is an important feature of the Commission on Sustainable Development's approach to sustainable development. This has included numerous inter-sessional meetings and initiatives organized, individually and jointly, by Governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations which significantly enriched substantive preparations for the annual sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the meetings of its subsidiary bodies. The Commission on Sustainable Development has also held two annual Inter-sessional Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Groups which meet prior to the regular sessions of the Commission to prepare its discussions on specific agenda items.

8. The Bureaux of the Commission met regularly during the period 1993-1996, providing policy guidance on preparations for the upcoming sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The work of the Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development contributed to the greater visibility of the Commission on Sustainable Development in other meetings and processes relevant to sustainable development and enhanced the overall outreach of the Commission. In light of the above, Member States, in the context of the 1997 review, may wish to consider the proposal, tabled by the Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its second session and supported by a number of countries, to elect the future Bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development in such a manner and at such a time as to allow it not only to direct preparations of the upcoming session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, but also to be responsible for conducting the upcoming session.

9. At the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1995, an open-ended Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) was established as a subsidiary body of the Commission on Sustainable Development, with a two-year mandate to pursue consensus and formulate coordinated proposals for action aimed at combating deforestation and forest degradation and to promote management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. The Panel, which has met four times and will be submitting its final report to the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1997, has been supported by: (a) an informal high-level inter-agency task force consisting of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), the World Bank, the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat and the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity;[2] and (b) a small secretariat funded by voluntary extrabudgetary contributions including secondment of staff by FAO, UNEP, UNDP and ITTO. These institutional arrangements, with their emphasis on informal inter-agency collaboration and interaction in meeting the work requirements of the Panel, have been instrumental in its effective functioning.

(b) Work programme

10. The Commission on Sustainable Development adopted a multi-year thematic programme of work[3] at its first session in 1993 and completed it at its fourth session in 1996. This first programme of work was organized in a way that allowed for in-depth review of all individual chapters of Agenda 21 as well as review of the progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.[4] While some cross-sectoral chapters have been reviewed every year, other cross-sectoral chapters and most of the sectoral ones have been considered once over the period of three years. This method of work has facilitated the Commission on Sustainable Development's consideration of all chapters of Agenda 21 at least once. It has assisted in the analysis of institutional and policy changes and activities at the international, national and "major groups" level to implement all chapters of Agenda 21. It has also helped the Commission on Sustainable Development to adopt specific recommendations to operationalize specific recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, and to provide a forum for exchange of relevant experiences.

11. As an outcome of this initial cycle of review, the Commission on Sustainable Development adopted four specific work programmes on (a) indicators for sustainable development, (b) transfer of environmentally sound technologies, cooperation and capacity-building, (c) changing production and consumption patterns and (d) education, public awareness and training.

(c) Salient features

12. Each session of the Commission has included a high-level segment, which has taken the form of a dialogue on priority issues of concern. It has been attended by a large number of ministers (over 40) and high-level decision makers from a variety of ministries from all over the world.

13. The Commission on Sustainable Development has functioned as a high-level policy organ for the promotion of sustainable development, emphasizing an integrated approach involving all actors in a participatory process. Examples of the areas where the Commission on Sustainable Development has played an agenda-setting role include, most particularly, the global freshwater assessment initiated by the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, mentioned above. The Commission on Sustainable Development also identified areas where major gaps existed in the international discussion of sustainable development, including such economic sectors as energy, transport and tourism.

14. The sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development have seen the involvement of a larger number of major group representatives, who have not only contributed directly and substantively to the work of the Commission, but also organized a large number of side events on relevant topics which have added to the richness of the debate during the regular sessions.

15. In pursuance of the decision taken by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its first session in 1993, Governments and organizations have submitted information and reports at subsequent sessions of the Commission. Reporting has been progressively streamlined and simplified at the request of the Commission and in consultation among United Nations system organizations and the convention secretariats. The national reports, which in previous years were summarized and presented in the context of chapters under review, have been compiled, for the 1997 session, into country profiles that can be used as the basis for future reporting and updating. During the third and fourth sessions of the Commission, selective country presentations were made at the plenary meetings. This allowed in-depth consideration and direct exchange of views on specific country experiences in relation to the chapters under review.

16. The United Nations system has contributed extensively to the preparations for the sessions of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The task manager system created by the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) has operated effectively in undertaking consultations, preparing reports and ensuring follow-up for the Commission on Sustainable Development. In that process, task managers solicited inputs from relevant organizations within and outside the United Nations system, including major groups. This participatory approach has been appreciated by all parties concerned and has contributed to strengthening contacts and further prospects for cooperation.

2. Linking the Commission on Sustainable Development with the governing bodies of various organizations

17. For most organizations, mandates received from their respective governing bodies have been complementary, reaffirming decisions taken by the Commission on Sustainable Development with respect to Agenda 21 implementation and follow-up.

18. Agency governing bodies have been kept regularly informed of Commission on Sustainable Development decisions and in some cases these bodies consider agency reports before they are submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development. In other cases, secretariats have already incorporated Commission on Sustainable

Development recommendations into documentation prepared for the governing bodies. At the same time, the task manager system has helped ensure that the decisions and concerns of other governing bodies are incorporated in the reports of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Sustainable Development.

19. That sustainable development issues have continued to receive high-level political attention in the governing bodies of the various organizations is reflected in the fact that programmes of relevance to sustainable development have, in general, been less subject to across-the-board budget cuts.

Linkages with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

20. Agenda 21, in chapter 38, stressed the need for an enhanced and strengthened role for UNEP and its Governing Council, and that the Governing Council should, within its mandate, continue to play its role with regard to policy guidance and coordination in the field of the environment, taking into account the development perspective.

21. UNEP's Governing Council maintains a close relationship with the Commission on Sustainable Development. Accordingly, relevant Commission on Sustainable Development decisions are brought to the attention of the Governing Council at its regular sessions, in order that they may be taken fully into account in the execution of its role of directing and prioritizing the work of the Programme. Thus, UNEP's programme of work for the biennium 1996-1997, as approved by the Governing Council, is an attempt to provide the right framework for an integrated response to the concerns of the Commission on Sustainable Development. In this regard, UNEP's Governing Council at its eighteenth session, re-emphasized the need for UNEP, in accordance with its mandate and in implementation of Agenda 21, to continue to provide effective support to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development.[5]

22. The Governing Council also requested UNEP's Executive Director to inform the Commission on Sustainable Development of its relevant decisions. In this respect, UNEP's Governing Council, at its eighteenth session, recognized the importance of clarifying the roles of the many players in the sustainable development arena. Its decision 18/7 clarifies the mandates and practices of the Governing Council and its secretariat in relation to the mandate and practice of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development. It was also decided that the next session of the Governing Council would be held early in 1997 in order to allow for a substantive input to be provided by the Governing Council to the special session of the General Assembly.

23. These two sources of mandates for UNEP and many other United Nations system organizations committed to United Nations Conference on Environment and Development follow-up have contributed to the process of streamlining the organizational arrangements, and focusing and integrating the work programme, in order to be able to respond effectively to the respective yet complementary directives. Naturally, having to respond to the Commission on Sustainable Development's decisions involves substantial additional burdens on human and financial resources that have to be borne within existing means.

24. In the case of UNEP, its organizational and programmatic restructuring was reflected in budgetary directives of UNEP's Governing Council seventeenth session (May 1993), marking a significant shift of emphasis towards meeting the goals of Agenda 21. Similarly, the programme of work for 1996-1997, approved by the Governing Council at its eighteenth session, involved thoroughly reprioritizing emerging environmental issues. This trend is likely to continue in light of the proposals to be presented to UNEP's Governing Council at its nineteenth session on the work programme for 1998-1999. UNEP, like many other United Nations system organizations, is increasingly being challenged to achieve more results with less resources in the face of recent financial constraints.

3. High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development

25. The High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development, composed of eminent persons serving in their individual capacities, was established in 1993 to provide advice to the Secretary-General on sustainable development issues. It does so by examining innovative approaches to sustainable development, identifying emerging issues and formulating policy proposals for consideration by Governments and international organizations. It serves as a link between the views and concerns of major constituencies and groups, and is a means to strengthen partnerships with them and deepen their knowledge and understanding of activities within the United Nations system. As a contribution to the special session of the General Assembly, the Board's members have focused on energy, water and transport, which they consider critical future issues for sustainable development. They have identified practical policy measures, in particular relating to pricing and investment, for promoting sustainable development in those areas.

B. Regional initiatives

26. A variety of regional initiatives have grown out of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development process. For example, all of the geographical regions have sponsored ministerial-level meetings as follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. These have helped to translate global issues into regional ones by identifying regional priorities for programmes to implement the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development outcomes and to raise public and political awareness. The policy directives of these ministerial conferences are generally aimed at promoting institutional development and capacity-building at the national level. As these meetings have moved from an emphasis on resources conservation to sustainable use of resources and development issues, they have attracted participation from ministries other than the environmental ones.

27. Issues of regional scope are also taken up through other means, such as regional and subregional conventions, trade agreements and joint programmes. Regional initiatives are playing a growing role in implementing certain global conventions, notably the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change[6] and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance

Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention); and a regional focus is expressly contemplated under the annexes to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa.[7] In a large geographical region like Asia, subregional cooperation has played an important role in such areas as biodiversity, climate change, coastal environment and freshwater.

28. Regional economic arrangements have rapidly encompassed new countries and new policy areas and have continued to develop after the completion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations. For example, the three member States of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) entered into a parallel agreement and established a Commission on Environmental Cooperation. This framework provides for citizen involvement in monitoring compliance with national environmental laws and regulations.

29. All the regional commissions of the United Nations have programmes for the environment or sustainable development resulting from the various ministerial meetings mentioned above. In addition, regional offices of United Nations organizations have taken steps to strengthen their regional activities. Regional development banks, working more closely with regional bodies of the United Nations system, also increasingly promote sustainable development objectives, reflecting increasing demands for assistance in sustainable development-related areas from national Governments.

30. New forms of cooperation have emerged between the regional commissions, and the regional and country offices of other United Nations agencies and programmes and other organizations. A number of intergovernmental meetings at the regional level have adopted political statements and action plans for sustainable development. They have been convened in association with the regional commissions and other regional organizations such as the Organization of American States (OAS), the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the South Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP) and the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

C. Individual organizations

31. The response of individual organizations of the United Nations system to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development's sustainable development agenda is assessed in terms of the three basic functions of intergovernmental organizations: (a) policy development, (b) the collection, synthesis, analysis and dissemination of data and information to inform action at all levels and (c) the delivery of technical and financial support to strengthen human and institutional capabilities at national and regional levels. Developments in these functional areas are reflected in, and influenced by, changes in each body's organizational arrangements.

32. Many agency programmes related to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development goals were already emerging or evolving during the preparatory process leading up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

and its follow-up have broadened the scope of existing programmes, with consequent changes in financial and human resource requirement needs and have helped to sharpen the responsibilities of the different agencies.

33. Programme adjustments have been made by all agencies, in accordance with guidance received from and the approval of their governing bodies. Criteria and standards to assess the relevance and impact of these changes need further development and amplification.

34. UNEP's post-United Nations Conference on Environment and Development restructuring has been designed to equip the organization to focus and deliver results, in an integrated manner, on the priority areas entrusted to UNEP by Agenda 21. The role and priorities of UNEP, as reflected in its organizational structure and its successive biennial work programmes since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, indicate a fundamental shift, largely in reaction to Agenda 21 and based on a clear assessment of needs, from a sectoral approach in respect of the environment to a fully integrated strategy, that is responsive to the agenda for sustainable development. UNEP's approach concentrates on the areas where the Programme has a comparative advantage and enhances UNEP's ability to provide comprehensive policy guidance and coordination in the field of environment, taking into account the development perspective (as mandated in Agenda 21, para. 38.21).

35. In general, policy has been the driving force for organizational and programme changes undertaken by the various organizations. In some cases, the establishment of a new policy on sustainable development has driven the decision on structural arrangements and led to the establishment of new organizational units. In other cases, the existing policies and priorities of the agencies emphasized the social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions underlying sustainable development to a sufficient extent so that new structures were not felt to be necessary. In yet other cases, the mandates emerging from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development had such extensive implications that the entire programme budget had to be reformulated and reoriented.

36. External and internal influences and interactions have been important in modifying the policy and programme focus of various agencies. Such influences have included the changed political and programme priorities of national Governments and the requirements of international conventions and expectations of additional funding through such funding mechanisms as the Global Environment Facility (GEF). Non-governmental organizations and major groups have increasingly emerged as a factor influencing agency priorities.

37. Just as internal agency policies set the agenda for an organization's entire programme, national policies establish a basic threshold for development activities, no matter where and by whom they are carried out. Such policies promote the dissemination of sound approaches from individual projects to the entire sector(s). The intergovernmental and governing bodies provide a forum for Governments in which to identify and agree on environmentally sound norms, procedures and practices. This is most clear in international convention processes, but is also evident in numerous examples of guidelines and practices adopted by various United Nations organizations.

38. Whatever the choice of structural arrangements, the key to organizational success has been the need to promote coordination, cooperation and an integrated approach to sustainable development. Strong political support at the highest levels of the organizations has proved to be essential for achieving a positive organization-wide response. At the same time, the intellectual base for sustainable development work is being strengthened through partnerships and networks within and outside the United Nations system and most particularly with major groups and the private sector. It is also critical that structural arrangements and the expansion and integration of expertise related to sustainable development be reinforced by corresponding financial arrangements within the organization.

D. Cooperation and coordination in the United Nations system

39. It was envisaged that implementation of Agenda 21 would require active involvement of all relevant international institutions, both within and outside the United Nations system, that are dealing with specific economic, social or environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development follow-up, and the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, have mobilized commitment to the goals of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system and in numerous non-United Nations organizations worldwide. At the inter-secretariat level, this work has been led and coordinated through the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development which included broad outreach and interaction with various intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.

40. While some limitations remain, the task manager system adopted by the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development has proved to be an effective means of inter-agency cooperation and joint action. It provides a network of focal points throughout the system for the exchange of information and the preparation of Commission on Sustainable Development documentation. More detailed assessment of the functioning of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development is found in the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) statement to the 1997 special session of the General Assembly on the subject, which is also being made available to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session.

41. UNEP performs its coordination role at the policy level through the Inter-Agency Environment Coordination Group (IAEG), of which all relevant United Nations agencies and programmes are members. An important initiative currently taking place within IAEG is the development of a "United Nations system-wide strategy in the field of the environment".

42. Cooperation and partnerships have expanded in scope, involving not only other United Nations agencies and convention secretariats but new partners outside the United Nations system, such as bilateral donors and various major groups, including the private sector. The scientific centres of excellence in developing countries promoted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Third World Academy of Science (TWAS) are an example of this.

43. At the country level, the UNDP resident representative/United Nations resident coordinator has, in some cases, organized sectoral or thematic coordination forums with the participation of United Nations organizations and bilateral donor agencies in such areas as agriculture, environment, forestry, water supply, poverty alleviation and gender and development. In other cases, the World Bank has played a role in coordinating donor meetings.

44. It is recognized, however, that the responsibility for coordinating external assistance, from multilateral, bilateral or other international organizations, rests first and foremost with the Government concerned. Governments are increasingly focusing on developing or strengthening their own capacity to coordinate the collaboration with external partners.

III. UNFULFILLED EXPECTATIONS

A. Enhancing the role and functioning of the United Nations system

45. The financial resources available to support Agenda 21 and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development follow-up activities have not reached the level anticipated during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development preparatory process. The declining levels of official development assistance (ODA) have adversely impacted on multilateral programme delivery within the United Nations system. United Nations organizations have faced successive years of zero growth or generally reduced regular budgets, from which activities formulated in direct response to Agenda 21 would be funded. At the same time, extrabudgetary resources have increased, in relation to regular budgets, to meet the steadily and substantially increased programme demands required for United Nations Conference on Environment and Development follow-up. While the sources of such extrabudgetary funds have been limited to relatively few countries so far, it would be important for more countries to support specific follow-up activities in the future.

46. Discrepancies or inconsistencies may increasingly exist between priorities identified by various intergovernmental bodies including the Commission on Sustainable Development and between these priorities and the funds made available in the regular budgets of United Nations organizations. In providing extrabudgetary support, donor Governments may need to consider more carefully the mandates established by the governing bodies of the United Nations organizations concerned.

47. While sources of funding should be diversified to the extent possible, innovative schemes for raising available funds need to be considered further. Underfunding of certain priority programmes is due less to weak internal mechanisms than to the failure to attract outside resources in an effective way. Notwithstanding the importance of the overall level of funding, the ways in which funds are used are equally important. There is thus a need to devise better funding strategies both at global and at local levels.

48. With regard to GEF, capacities available within the United Nations system should be better taken into account and fully drawn upon in future GEF work related to project identification and implementation.

B. Cooperation and coordination in the United Nations system

49. The potential of the task manager system to foster joint implementation and sharing of resources within the system needs to be substantially developed. Consideration needs to be given to whether a task manager-type approach would be useful among United Nations system organizations represented at regional level.

50. Further work is needed on country-level programming and coordination among the organizations of the United Nations system as well as bilateral and multilateral programmes, where this is possible, recognizing the central role of national Governments in this regard, particularly ministries of finance and planning.

51. A single planning framework at country level could have a positive impact on programming coordinated support to national Governments by the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions.

IV. EMERGING PRIORITIES

A. Strengthening institutional capabilities and arrangements

52. Affirmation of the economic, social, environmental and cultural principles inherent in the concept of sustainable development would be enhanced by more systematic consideration of the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and related major United Nations conferences. Further effort is required by the United Nations system to integrate the results of the various United Nations conferences into their policies and programmes, including at the intergovernmental level. The results of major United Nations conferences related to sustainable development should be treated in an integrated manner in the deliberations of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which should also consider how to improve support for integrated follow-up at regional and national levels. Further streamlining and adjustments may be appropriate to avoid duplication of functions within the structure of the Economic and Social Council.

53. Given the increased number of decision-making bodies concerned with sustainable development, including those related to the international conventions, there is an ever-greater need for coordination at the intergovernmental level through consistent and coherent positions of Governments in these various forums, as well as for the development and strengthening of a collaborative process among secretariats. This could facilitate highlighting specific policy and programme relationships as initiatives are developed in international institutions and convention processes at global and regional levels. It would be helpful to Governments and others concerned if the cooperating secretariats could clearly indicate interactions and synergies among agency and convention initiatives in relation to data and information, policy

formulation and operational programmes, as well as identify regional and sectoral implications.

B. Enhancing the role and functioning of the United Nations system

54. The collective view of the secretariats of the organizations of the United Nations system is that the concept of sustainable development should continue to provide an 'overarching' policy framework for the entire spectrum of United Nations activities in the economic, social and environmental fields at global, regional and national levels. Further work on sustainable development should not be confined to review of the implementation of Agenda 21 and to the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development. All intergovernmental and inter-agency bodies and processes need to contribute, within their mandates and areas of competence, to further progress in achieving the goals of sustainable development through concrete action and programmes, not only at the global level but also at the regional and country levels. Full account must also be taken of the overall framework for cooperation agreed by the international community in the context of the coordinated follow-up to all recent United Nations conferences, since all have made an important contribution to specific aspects of the global sustainable development agenda.

55. These considerations, however, should not lead to the conclusion that, in future, intergovernmental deliberation on all issues relevant to sustainable development should take place in, or under the guidance of, the Commission on Sustainable Development. The challenge in the future is to ensure that all relevant policy-making, and activities of governing and expert bodies, work towards achieving the goals of sustainable development, as well as to ensure continuing political commitment in this regard. Only in this way can the United Nations system play the support role envisaged for it in Agenda 21. Such work, under the overall guidance and coordination of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, should be consistent and mutually reinforcing, promoting further action and cooperation to implement specific programmatic areas of Agenda 21.

56. The overall institutional framework for the implementation of Agenda 21, as outlined in chapter 38, would seem to be fully relevant for the period after the 1997 review. However, the General Assembly at its special session may wish to consider how this framework could best be deployed in the future, taking into account the experience gained in the period 1992-1997, and the substantive results achieved since Rio, as well as recent decisions taken by the Assembly and the Economic and Social Council in the context of ongoing restructuring of the United Nations and of the follow-up to other international conferences. In particular, it would seem essential to ensure that further work aimed at the implementation of Agenda 21 provides for an integrated and coordinated approach to the implementation of the outcomes of the other global conferences that took place after Rio and that are highly relevant to the achievement of sustainable development.

57. It would be essential for the General Assembly at its special session to take into account the considerations outlined above for elaborating its decisions and recommendations regarding the specific roles to be played in the period after the 1997 review by various bodies, programmes and organizations of the United Nations system.

58. It would seem that in the future the Commission on Sustainable Development, in discharging its functions as outlined in General Assembly resolution 47/191, should focus on those areas where it has comparative strength. It provides a forum for periodic review of the overall progress in the implementation of Agenda 21; for policy debate and consensus-building on sustainable development issues; and for strengthening partnerships for sustainable development, including with major groups. In other areas, such as coordination of implementation at the national level or sectoral assessments, the Commission could limit itself to maintaining and strengthening communication/interaction with other actors involved in Agenda 21 implementation. The aim would be to advise the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly on the promotion of coherent actions and provide general policy guidance. Specific proposals on the possible programme of work of the Commission on Sustainable Development after 1997 are contained in document E/CN.17/1997/2.

59. Regarding the other bodies, programmes and organizations of the United Nations system, including financial institutions, their future role in the implementation of Agenda 21, it seems, should be twofold:

- The main focus of their activities should be the coordinated implementation of specific programmes and activities emanating from Agenda 21, conventions relevant to sustainable development, and the decisions taken and the instruments established after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development by the Commission on Sustainable Development and other bodies and conferences (for example, the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety, the Washington Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities,[8] the Habitat Agenda,[9] and so forth). Priority here should be given to achieving synergy, promoting joint programming and supporting implementation at national level;

- They should continue to support sustainable development debate in the Commission on Sustainable Development by providing the Commission with expert advice and policy proposals on specific aspects of sustainable development (for example, UNEP: environment; the World Health Organization (WHO): health; the International Labour Organization (ILO): employment and sustainable livelihoods; the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat): human settlements; the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD): economic growth and trade; FAO: food and agriculture, and so on). Such advice would be provided through their governing and policy-making bodies as well as through their secretariats (task managers).

60. The main challenge is to ensure that policy decisions and recommendations on sustainable development adopted at international level (in other words, through the Commission on Sustainable Development) are translated into specific

programmes and projects carried out in relevant sectors/areas by agencies and organizations, and into concrete actions at the field level. At the same time, it would be important to ensure that policy discussion on sustainable development will benefit from practical experiences gained through international cooperation at the country and regional levels, as well as in specific sectoral programmes. Two principal conditions would seem essential to achieving this goal:

(a) Improved policy coordination within national Governments in order to provide:

- Greater coherence in the positions taken by member countries in the various governing and other policy-making bodies within the United Nations system, as well as in the decisions taken by these bodies, including the governing bodies of financial institutions;

- More effective allocation of resources in accordance with agreed priorities;

(b) Further enhancement of intersectoral cooperation through ACC's Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and its system of task managers, in particular with a view to strengthening the linkages between top-down policy decisions taken at the global level and bottom-up priority-setting at country and regional levels.

61. There is a need for a more effective and mutually supportive link between global policy discussion, national/regional needs and realities, and United Nations system support to implementation at the national and regional levels. More specifically, it is essential to ensure that policy decisions and recommendations on sustainable development adopted at the international level are translated into specific programmes and projects carried out in relevant sectors/areas by agencies and organizations, and into concrete actions at the field level. At the same time, policy discussions on sustainable development could benefit from practical experiences gained through international cooperation at the country and regional levels, as well as in specific sectoral programmes.

62. Negotiations are planned during 1997 for a new replenishment of the GEF. These negotiations will have special importance for the future work of the GEF, as well as a direct impact on the availability of new and additional grant and concessional funding for sustainable development with global benefits at the global, regional and national level.

C. Regional cooperation

63. There is a need to strengthen intergovernmental processes that give concrete expression and focus to the goals and strategies of Agenda 21 at the regional level, in relation to policies, information resources and operational planning. The Commission on Sustainable Development should remain aware of sustainable development issues of a regional character to ensure that such issues are reviewed at the global level, taking into account the importance of

regional and subregional cooperation and implementation in Agenda 21 and the role different actors can play at the regional level. There is a need to establish and strengthen direct linkages between the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development and various regional initiatives and programmes.

64. There is increasing emphasis on the regional implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and conventions, as well as on more detailed regional implementing instruments. Convention secretariats and United Nations agencies are increasingly called upon to assist Governments at the regional level in preparing for convention-related meetings and implementing the results. Activities include assistance in the preparation of regional agreements, and work on protocols and amendments, modalities and methodologies for implementation and in the interpretation of the impacts and compatibility among various agreements. It may also be necessary to designate appropriate agencies with the required capacity and expertise to facilitate the negotiation of regional sustainable development agreements.

65. The importance of a regional focus for sustainable development is increasingly recognized and intersectoral cooperation among regional organizations and international organizations operating at the regional level is under way. The growing number of regional organizations requires a clear division of labour and a better use of existing regional cooperation mechanisms.

66. Institutional arrangements need to be strengthened to ensure effective consultations and coordination between the headquarters and regional organs of the system, both at regional and at country levels. Such arrangements help devolve implementation actions related to Agenda 21 from the global to the regional level, as stressed by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fourth session. The follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development calls for interaction and partnerships among a wide range of regional entities within and outside the United Nations system, as part of such arrangements. This should include closer cooperation and coherence with respect to the work of different regional intergovernmental bodies and their secretariats.

Notes

[1] Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

[2] See United Nations Environment Programme, Convention on Biological Diversity (Environmental Law and Institutions Programme Activity Centre), June 1992.

[3] Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1993, Supplement No. 5 (E/1993/25/Rev.1), part two, chap. I, sect. A, annex.

[4] Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, 25 April-6 May 1994 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.94.I.18 and corrigenda), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

[5] See Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 25 (A/50/25), annex, decision 18/7, para. 3.

[6] A/AC.237/18 (Part II)/Add.1 and Corr.1, annex I.

[7] A/49/84/Add.2, annex, appendix II.

[8] Report of the Intergovernmental Conference to Adopt a Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (A/51/116, annex I), appendix II.

[9] Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996 (A/CONF.165/14), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.